

Apocrypha

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Apocrypha

by [xylodemon](#)

Summary

Two can keep a secret, if one of the two is dead.

Notes

Written for the [Squicky Pairings Challenge](#) on LiveJournal.

Verse I

None for One and One for All

When Severus walks into the Library, it is full.

Students are crowded around every table and desk, their heads bowed quietly over their work. Severus is immediately displeased. He had come upstairs from the dungeons in the hope of escaping other students, though he supposes he shouldn't be surprised. There are still two days of OWLs, and OWLs are enough to force the most dedicated slackers from their normal routine.

Even Crabbe and Goyle are present, sitting with Nott and Rosier at a desk that is really meant for two, and Severus suspects neither of them have set foot in the Library since the tour Madam Pince gave during first year.

He considers leaving, but decides to stay, because returning to the dungeons is not an option. While there are less people downstairs, the Library is *quiet*, something that cannot be said about the

dungeons. The Slytherins from other years seem to be celebrating the mere fact that they do not have OWLs, as loudly and obnoxiously as possible.

And he needs to study, because he has Charms tomorrow. Charms is easily his worst subject, but his parents are expecting an O, regardless.

He lingers in the doorway for a moment, casting about for a vacant seat. Eventually, he spies one at the rear of the Library, tucked in a far corner, against the divider that separates the Restricted Section from the Library proper. The desk is small, and the area is poorly lit, but it is secluded, and more importantly, empty, and Severus is in no position to be picky.

Severus passes the other Slytherins as he heads towards the back of the Library. They do not acknowledge him, but that suits Severus just fine. He doesn't want to study with that lot, and would not, even if he was invited, even if there was a chair available and space enough to do so.

Halfway to the desk, he notices that it is actually occupied, by a single person sitting in the shadow of the divider. Severus is not of the mind to share, but he keeps moving, hoping it is some hapless Hufflepuff he can bully out of the area.

He takes a few more steps, then freezes, his lip curling in distaste.

It's Lupin, slouched low in his chair with a book in his lap, his tie loosened and his robes unbuttoned. Open books are stacked on the desk, enough books, Severus realizes, for four people, and his legs are propped up on an adjacent chair in a way that says he means to stay a while.

And, Lupin is not alone. Pettigrew is on the other side of him, sitting practically on top of him, reading over Lupin's shoulder and writing furiously on a bit of parchment. His hair is tousled in a horrid mockery of Potter's infamous style, and his round face is contorted with concentration, his lower lip caught between his teeth.

Severus is almost wondering where Black and Potter are when Black appears, emerging from the stacks as if Summoned. He's in more of a state than Lupin; his robes are nowhere in sight, his tie is unknotted and his sleeves are rolled up to the elbow. He pulls out the chair across from Lupin, dislodging Lupin's feet, then turns the chair around and straddles it, smiling at Lupin in a way Severus is sure is meant to be charming.

Suddenly, Potter is there as well, seeming to materialize out of nowhere. He strips off his robes before he sits, tossing them absently to Pettigrew before settling in the chair next to Black. He takes up a book at Lupin's prompting and opens it, but ignores it in favour of whispering with Black.

Severus wants to leave, but he can't make his legs work, like he is trapped in a spell he wants no part of. So he watches, watches Potter cuff Black in the head and Black charm Lupin's quill to dance, watches Lupin tutor Pettigrew and Pettigrew break into a wide smile at the smallest, offhand compliment from Potter.

And he hates them, hates them for their arrogance and surety, for the way they strut and make much of themselves, hates them for who they are and what they represent.

Potter, the king, lording over his subjects, even in a small, half-forgotten table in the back of the Library. Black, the handsome, charming knight, swooping in on his broomstick to lure simpering girls from their boyfriends. Lupin, the counsellor, securing his place by keeping Potter and Black in good grades. Pettigrew, the fool, the jester, earning his keep by putting a smile on his lordship's face.

And he hates them, because they are everything he despises, because they are everything he is not and everything he wants to be.

Severus starts to turn; he needs to leave before he is seen, but it is too late, Black is already looking at him, his face dark and his eyes icy and hateful. Fear settles cold in Severus' stomach and he hates himself for it, hates himself almost as much as he hates them. So he stays, forcing himself to return Black's stare, telling himself they cannot harm him and get away with it in the Library.

Black doesn't turn away or speak, but Potter looks up, as if he can read Black's mind. His gaze is as cool as Black's, but it lacks true hatred. It is flat and bored and disinterested, as if hexing Severus in Library where no one will see is simply not worth the time or energy.

And that infuriates Severus, infuriates him more than Black's malevolence. He can accept Black's hate, because the feeling is more than mutual, but Potter's apathy stings and burns worse than any hex or curse.

Severus reaches for his wand, not caring that he is in the Library. He wants to make Potter scream, wants to make him hurt and ache and *feel*. Potter sees this, but he doesn't stand or go for his wand. He doesn't have to; Black is already up, his chair slamming into the desk as he jumps to his feet. Black is in front of Severus with his wand at the ready before Severus even gets a hand in his pocket.

Black glares at Severus, daring him to move or pull his wand, but Potter just watches, as if the entire thing is a show for his benefit. Pettigrew and Lupin are watching as well, Pettigrew's expression is a poor copy of Potter's, but Lupin's is blank and unreadable. Severus sees something in Lupin's eyes that could be pity, and it only makes Severus hate more, his insides turning to ice.

There is a long moment where no one moves, where everything is slow and silent and almost unreal. It's broken by Lupin, who sighs heavily, closing his book with a snap and tossing it on the table.

"Sirius," he says, quietly, his tone just above a whisper.

Black looks back, glancing at Lupin over his shoulder, and they stare at each other for nearly a minute. No words are exchanged, but some kind of conversation takes place, because Black shrugs and puts his wand away, and walks over to right his chair.

Once Black is seated, Lupin twists around in his chair, facing Severus as if he means to speak. Severus never gives him the chance, whirling around before Lupin even opens his mouth, because he doesn't want to hear it, any more than he wants to see the pity in Lupin's eyes, any more than he wants to look at Lupin's prefect's badge, mocking him as it catches the feeble torchlight.

Verse II

An Idle Mind is the Devil's Playground

It's too nice a day for History of Magic. The sun is shining and the sky is clear, and a pleasant breeze is blowing through the trees. It is the kind of day for picnics and flying and pranks involving water and the Squid, not lectures on goblin rebellions and the legislation concerning werewolf registration.

James glances out the window a bit mournfully as he passes it, but allows Remus to herd him into the classroom, because there is nothing for it. McGonagall no longer keeps track of which Marauder skips what and when, if one of them misses class, she simply hands detention to all four. Sirius had complained loudly the first time; he hadn't thought he should land detention because Peter skived Potions. McGonagall had only smiled thinly, and said that while he may not have skipped Potions, he was still Sirius Black, so he was certainly guilty of something.

Which means James is going to class, because it looks bad for a prefect to have detention, and Sirius is about four punishments away from a Quidditch ban that will last the rest of his natural life. It's always good to have a prefect on your side, and Sirius is the best Beater Gryffindor has seen in years, so James takes his seat, pulls out a parchment and quill, and prepares himself to be bored out of his mind.

It only takes fifteen minutes.

Binns in on about the Vampire Treaties, and how they relate to the Beast and Being division of the Ministry. James doesn't care, and he is not really listening. He lost Binns' train of thought as soon as the ghost started talking. The parchment in front of him is three-quarters full, and not a bit of it has anything to do with Vampires, treaties, or the History of Magic in general. It's doodles and scribbles and an unflattering sketch of Sirius, and Lily's name in the Scandinavian runes he saw in one of Moony's textbooks.

It wouldn't be so bad, James thinks, if the class wasn't split with Slytherin, or if he was sitting anywhere near his mates. But the Slytherins are there, and the Marauders are all over the room, because Dumbledore put a stop to them sitting together in any class, especially Potions, in the middle of second year.

Remus is the closest to him, just one seat up and one to the left. James thinks he could get a note to him without being seen, but Remus wouldn't notice, and wouldn't answer if he did. Remus' attention is wholly on Professor Binns, his hand flying across the parchment as he takes down every word coming out of the old ghost's mouth.

Peter is writing as well, hunched over his desk as he carefully forms letters on the parchment in front of him. He looks nearly as studious as Remus, but if Peter's taking notes in class, James will eat his broom. He's probably writing to that girl he's seeing; James doesn't remember her name, but she's short and blonde and James thinks she's in Hufflepuff. Peter's girlfriends are always in Hufflepuff, and James never remembers their names. He just calls them 'Helga' which Peter doesn't like, but Peter never, ever mentions it.

James dismisses the idea, because a note to Peter would require a charm. Peter is three desks up from Remus, and James doesn't trust his aim that far with something that is not a Quaffle.

Sirius is the farthest away from him, all the way on the other side of the room, an arrangement James is sure was made on purpose. Not that it matters, as the great prat is asleep, long legs stretched out in front of him, his head tilted back and his mouth hanging open.

James hopes he has a crick in his neck when he wakes up; he hopes Sirius' neck is stiff and sore and hurts like Hell. It would serve Sirius right, for abandoning James in his time of need. James also hopes Sirius complains about it, because he won't feel bad, he won't charm it better and he certainly won't rub the knotted muscles loose, even if Sirius asks.

Sirius has Remus for that, anyway, even if Sirius won't admit it, even if Remus thinks James doesn't know.

He's not sure how he feels about that, Remus and *his best friend*, Remus and *his Sirius*, so he just doesn't think about it, because there's no point in thinking about it until Sirius admits it.

James doesn't know *why* Sirius won't admit to it. Sirius has messed about with blokes before and no one took the piss. Maybe Sirius is embarrassed, not because Remus is a bloke, but because it looks like he and Remus mean business. James is not sure how he feels about that, either, not that he has room to talk.

Lily is two seats in front of Sirius, her red hair fire-bright in the sunlight coming through the classroom window. He's half-tempted to write her another poem, something poncey and sweet about how pretty her eyes are, and how birds would sing and the stars would align if she would only give him a date.

He doesn't, even though he wants to, because he knows she'll only shout at him and stuff it in his ear. She always stuffs them in his ear, without even reading them. Last time she charmed it, and he had to go to Pomfrey to get it removed.

James tugs on his ear at the memory and shifts uncomfortably in his seat, colour and heat rushing to his cheeks. Sirius had laughed himself pink at the sight; James in the Great Hall at dinner with a foot and a half of parchment protruding from his ear.

Everyone had a grand laugh at James' expense that day, especially the Slytherins. Snivellus had...

Snivellus.

Snape is at the very front of the room, nearly under Binns' transparent nose, his head bent over his work, lanky hair curtaining his pale, ugly face. He's writing as furiously as Remus, but he doesn't seem to be paying Binns' any mind, and James wonders if Snape is actually listening, or if he has his Defence text tucked away in his lap.

James narrows his eyes at the back of Snape's head and pulls his wand from his bag, formulating several different plans in his head. Just as he settles on one, Sirius gives a muffled snore from the other side of the room, which James decides is tacit agreement.

Mr. Padfoot would most definitely approve.

He lays his wand across his desk and drops his arm over it, the tip just poking out from underneath his wrist. He adjusts it with his free hand until it is perfectly aimed, just a hair to Snape's right, and lightly curls his fingers around the end.

He waits for Binns to start in again, then hisses the spell, his whisper hidden under the professor's raspy, monotonous voice. Snape's History of Magic book topples off his desk, thumping loudly against one of the legs before crashing to the floor.

Immediately, Snape whips his head around to glare at James, but James is expecting this, so he is prepared. He doesn't look over at Snape, he fixes his eyes on Binns and bites the inside of his cheek to keep himself from laughing.

The noise wakes Sirius, and when James looks over Sirius is regarding him with sleepy eyes and a foolish grin on his face. James nods slightly, and Sirius winks, all but asking James for a repeat performance.

Mr. Prongs is happy to oblige.

James lets Snape retrieve his book, counting to one hundred to pace himself, then whispers the

spell again, just as Binns is discussing the importance of the second marriage of Vlade the Flailing.

The book lands on the floor with a resounding smack and falls open, the pages fluttering back and forth in a parody of a friendly wave.

Snape scowls at James again, more murderously than before, but James only catches a glimpse because he is staring at his suddenly interesting parchment, embellishing the Scandinavian rune for 'Y'. When he dares to look up, Sirius is doubled over his desk, trying desperately not to laugh, and Remus has stopped taking notes to favour James with his 'prefect face'.

James' glee subsides briefly; he knows he'll be getting a lecture from Moony when class gets out. But Sirius lets out a strangled snort, and a sickly sort of blush is creeping up the back of Snivellus' neck, so James puts Remus' impending lecture out of his mind to make more room for mischief.

Lily is glaring at him as well, her green eyes narrowed and her lips pressed into a thin line. James flashes her a smile, which only makes her face stonier, but James sighs and lets it go. Pranking and wooing are mutually exclusive activities; he'll have plenty of time to proclaim his innocence to her later.

Snape's book hits the floor again, resulting in a round of snickers from the class, and when Snape turns around, James looks right at him and smiles. He can't possibly get in trouble, because Binns doesn't know it's him. Binns hasn't even noticed.

But Snivellus knows it's him, which suits James just fine, because there is not a single thing he can do about it.

Verse III

Crimson and Clover

Severus does well in Arithmancy and History of Magic; they require a reasonable attention span and a decent memory, and very little practical magic. He is lousy at Charms and only slightly better in Transfigurations. He knows the names of the spells and his wandwork is solid, but he has difficulty producing the desired results.

He excels in Defence, and is at the top of the class, just a point or two behind Lupin. This is not a surprise; he is predisposed to Dark Magic, and it is simple to counter spells he already knows how to perform.

He also excels in Potions, because at its base, Potions is very similar to Arithmancy and History. He only has to pay attention and remember facts, and follow the instructions exactly as they are laid out. He can brew the fussiest concoction with ease, has been able to since first year, a feat that impresses his professor and annoys his fellow classmates to no end.

Given his affinity towards Potions, he knows there is a twisted kind of irony in his current situation, even if it is not his fault, even if Potter is the reason he is a sickly shade of red and smells strongly of wet grass.

Potter is the one who chopped the mugwort when it was meant to be diced, and Potter is the one who added the eel eyes before stirring clockwise fifty times instead of after.

Potter is the one who has tragic and untimely accidents when partnered with Severus, accidents that

result in melted cauldrons and flying gelatinous slime. And since Potter seems reasonably capable when partnered with anyone else, even the most hopeless cases, Severus can only assume these 'accidents' happen on purpose.

Madam Pomfrey is quiet as she examines him, saying no more than the inspection spells, silent as she looks in his ears and nose and prods at his stomach and sides. She is stern as she proclaims there is nothing she can do, eyeing him as if she suspects the whole thing to be his fault.

Potter's accident turned a simple parchment tincture into a colouring glamour. And Potter evidently botched the colouring glamour as well. It is not reversible by spell, and Severus will just have to wait for the effects to dissipate on their own.

Severus decides to wait it out in his dormitory. It is dinner, and he is hungry, but he is not about to go into the Great Hall like this, just shy of Gryffindor red and smelling like he has been rolling around in the gardens. He takes the long way around, down unused staircases and half-forgotten corridors, which requires a good deal more walking, but lessens the risk of him being seen in his current state.

Halfway to the dungeons he finds himself thinking about Potter, wishing he had Potter's unnatural talent of skulking about unseen, of appearing and disappearing out of the very air. It's one of the many things about Potter that Severus finds infuriating, mainly because Severus cannot do it himself, and cannot figure on how Potter manages it.

He wonders what Potter would do if he was in Severus' shoes, if Potter looked and smelled as Severus did right now. He wonders if Potter would run up to Gryffindor and hide, and he tells himself Potter would do just that, but he knows he is only fooling himself, knows he is placating himself with lies.

Potter would burst into the Great Hall proudly, taking care that he was late, so his entrance would be noted by all. And Potter's detestable friends would probably charm themselves red to match, so Potter would not have to suffer alone.

Severus has no friends; he never has. If he went to dinner everyone would laugh, his housemates the loudest and hardest of all.

He hears footsteps at the end of the hallway and he hides, ducking behind a suit of armour that looks like it has not been dusted or oiled since it was forged. The hallway is dark, and the armour casts a long shadow. Severus hopes he will be spared the shame of being seen, spared the all too familiar lecture from one of his housemates on being an embarrassment to Slytherin.

He peers out over the armour's segmented arm when he hears the footsteps stop, but he sees no one, and he still sees no one when the footsteps start up again. Then, in the time it takes to blink and rub at his eyes, Potter is there, just a few steps away, in the middle of a hallway known to only a handful of Slytherins.

Potter lights his wand and stares at the wall across from Severus, scrutinizing it from floor to ceiling. He puts his back to the wall and paces the width of the hallway, heel to toe, as if he is measuring, and pauses to count something out on his fingers.

Severus is afraid of Potter, he's lying to himself when he says he is not, and his stomach knots fiercely when steps around the armour. He is afraid of Potter, but Potter is alone and in Slytherin territory, and Potter is probably up to no good.

"Potter," he growls, forcing his voice not to crack.

Potter whirls around and starts, surprise flitting over his face when he sees Severus. He immediately glances to his right, where Black should be, but Black is not there, nor are Lupin and Pettigrew, and it is all Severus can do not to laugh.

"Snivellus," Potter replies evenly. He considers Severus for a moment, then smirks. "You've got you're colour back."

Severus glances at his hands to find that Potter is telling the truth, he is no longer red, but that is not the point. The point is that Potter made him red to begin with, that Potter probably did it on purpose.

"That was no accident!" Severus snarls, pulling his wand. "You made me a freak for your own amusement!"

"You're already a freak, Snivellus," Potter interjects, laughter twisting his lips. "And that is not my fault. You can only blame your parents for your face."

"I'll say much the same, if you ever get in with that mudblood you're after," Severus spits. "Your children will be truly horrific things, half-blooded..."

He doesn't finish that sentence, because Potter rushes at him, hitting Severus in the chest with his shoulder and knocking him to the ground.

It's utterly unexpected and foreign; Potter's an arrogant arse and a Muggle-lover, but he is still a pureblood, and purebloods never resort to physical violence. Even Black, who is thoroughly disreputable and utterly deranged, or the Weasleys, the worst blood-traitors Severus has ever seen, have never stooped to fighting like Muggles.

Severus lays there briefly as Potter falls on top of him, too shocked to retaliate, too stunned to move. Potter shifts, and Severus is pinned to the stone floor by sharp knees straddling his body and a firm hand slamming down on his shoulder. Potter's free hand, balled in a fist, connects with Severus' stomach, just below the ribs, again and again and again.

The first punch knocks the wind out of him, and the second hurts, as does the third and the fourth and the fifth, a sharp ache spreading across Severus' lower body. Through the shortness of breath and the haze of pain, Severus is dimly aware that Potter is speaking, a fractured, jumbled litany spilling from Potter's lips.

Don't you talk about her, Snivellus. Don't you talk about her ever. Lily is worth ten of you, Snape, no, a hundred of you. A thousand. If you ever call her a mudblood again, I'll kill you! I swear to God, I'll kill you, Snivellus, and I'll just be doing everyone a favour.

He doesn't really hear Potter's words, but he hears what is behind them, hears the meaning underneath. Potter did not accost him because Severus offended him personally, Potter is defending his precious Evans' honour, defending a mudblood who will not give him the time of day.

That jolts Severus, wakes him, and anger courses through his body, urging him to shift and struggle, reminding him how to make his legs and arms move. He lacks the upper body strength to throw Potter off of him, but he hits him, pushing and punching and clawing and scraping.

He's still scared of Potter, terrified as Potter looms over him, his face sweaty and flushed and his eyes dark and angry. But the fear is laced with excitement, raw and addictive, and he relishes Potter's hisses of pain and the feel of Potter's flesh buckling and bruising under his hand.

He moves underneath Potter, twisting and struggling, shifting his hips up to buck Potter off of him. He wants to get Potter under *him*, wants Potter at his mercy, wants to grab Potter by a fistful of that insufferable hair, wants to smash Potter's head against the floor until he goes limp and quiet and still.

But Potter does not fall; he tightens the grip of his knees around Severus' body, leaning over Severus to keep his balance. He catches one of Severus' hands as it flies towards his face, wrapping strong fingers around Severus' wrist and slamming it into the floor above Severus' head.

He swings at Severus again, but Severus arches up and Potter stops, his head sagging forward, a tight, strangled breath forcing its way between Potter's gritted teeth. Severus doesn't know why Potter stilled and he doesn't care, all he knows is that Potter is distracted, and he bucks up again, hard, trying to take advantage of the moment to get Potter off of him.

Potter grinds against him, pushing down to meet him, and takes another ragged breath, a sound that is almost a moan and more than half a growl. Severus shifts again and Potter makes that sound again and Severus suddenly understands, realizes why there is a persistent press against his hip, realizes things have taken a very wrong turn.

"Potter," Severus snarls, squirming again, hoping he can at least get out from under Potter, of he cannot get Potter off of him.

"Shut up!" Potter hisses, clamping a hand over Severus' mouth. "Shut up! Just shut up!"

And Potter rocks against him, moaning low as he hides his face in Severus' neck, his breath ghosting hot and heavy over Severus' skin. Severus fights him, pushing and shoving at him with his free hand. He doesn't want this, not with a boy, not like this, not with *Potter* on the floor of a dusty, half-forgotten hallway.

Potter moves again, rolling his hips and Severus' gasps, feeling light-headed, his breath claustrophobic and thick behind Potter's hand. He's mortified and disgusted with himself, but he is hard, ridiculously hard, just as hard as Potter, and impossibly warm, heat coiling tight in his stomach and rushing over his skin every time Potter moves.

Severus closes his eyes, hiding from it, blocking out the sight of Potter on top of him, thrusting against him, their cocks sliding together through layers of cotton and wool. But, it feels too good, indescribably, endlessly good, and he hates it, hates Potter, hates himself, hates the part of himself that doesn't want Potter to stop.

Potter's movements grow jerky, desperate and erratic, and Severus feels himself rushing towards release. He bites his lip to stop it, bites down until a hint of copper spreads across his tongue. He doesn't want to give Potter this, doesn't want to give Potter anything, not after everything Potter has taken.

But Potter is coming, trembling on top of him, growling low against his neck, and Severus loses the fight, his control slipping away, tumbling him over the edge.

Severus doesn't open his eyes when Potter moves off of him, or when Potter mumbles something his direction. He doesn't open his eyes until well after he hears Potter leave, because he doesn't want to see Potter's face, doesn't want to watch Potter walk away.

Verse IV

Mad Dogs and Englishmen

James always figured Sirius would eventually run mad. He had just hoped Sirius would wait until after graduation to get on with it.

The plan is genius in some ways, so intricate and detailed and bloody brilliant James is almost angry he was not included from the first. But it is also completely daft and ridiculously dangerous. There is a gigantic margin for error, so many ways that something could go horribly wrong.

He's not surprised Peter confessed; Peter is often weak and cowardly, but he is also careful, and his survival instincts are strong. Peter is scared of Sirius, more scared of Sirius than he is of James, but he is also terrified of Dumbledore and McGonagall, terrified of being expelled.

Peter was not brave enough to tell Sirius no, not brave enough to go to the Headmaster, so when the reality of what Sirius was asking of him set in, he went to James, because everyone thinks James can keep Sirius under control.

James knows there is no force on earth that can tame Sirius Black, not even Remus, and in some twisted way, Remus is why Sirius set this up to begin with.

It started in Potions, which James almost finds funny, because most of the best, worst and truly strange things that have happened to James can be traced back to something that happened in Potions.

Remus was partnered with Snape for the latest Potions assignment: a delicate draught for detecting poisons in the human body that poor Moony would have likely blown up if left on his own. Remus didn't seem to mind, he knew he would not get a better grade if partnered with anyone else.

Mr. Padfoot did not approve, but Professor Rockwood was not interested in Sirius' pleas for clemency on Remus' behalf.

Sirius took to brooding in Potions, keeping a suspicious eye on Snape as he prepared his own ingredients, sneering every time he walked past Snape's desk. He was convinced that Snape would do something to harm Remus, use this opportunity to pay the Marauders back for everything they had ever said and done to him.

Remus and Snape worked well enough together; Snape was terse, but never outright rude, and Remus was quiet and did as he was told. Eventually, they came to some kind of understanding. They chatted while they worked, and seemed to get on, and Snape would occasionally greet Remus when he thought Sirius was not looking.

And this, from what Peter explained, is why James is hiding outside the Whomping Willow instead of lounging in the common room by the fire. Sirius is many things; he is loving and loyal and fierce and protective, but he is not forgiving and he is certainly not rational. Once he decided Snape wanted something from Remus, something other than retribution, he decided to treat Snape to the biggest prank of all.

Mr. Prongs thinks this is a very bad idea.

But Peter came to James too late, a little less than an hour ago. Remus has transformed and Sirius is in the Shack, and Snape has already been given the bait. There is no telling where Snape is right now, in the Library or his dorm or wandering the halls. James doesn't have the first clue where to

look, and Sirius has the Map, and Peter, unsurprisingly, has made himself scarce.

So James waits, because there is really nothing else he can do. He almost thinks it's for the best; the Shack's secret is out and there's no taking it back, and it is probably better this ends tonight. Waylaying Snape will only put things off, Snape will likely get curious and try again, next month or the month after or the month after that, when everyone least expects it and no one is paying attention.

James loves Sirius, loves Sirius with everything he has, but he will never understand him. He'll never understand how Sirius thinks, and how Sirius cannot see that Remus is completely arse over head for him, why he is continually paranoid that Remus is going to leave.

But to be fair, Remus flirts-- it's not overt and blatant like Sirius' behaviour, Remus may not even be conscious he does it, but he flirts, with soft smiles and shy glances, and amber eyes hidden behind his hair. James has seen it, James has seen people fall for it, if not for Lily and if not for Sirius, James might even have fallen for it himself.

Sirius thinks Snape is falling for it, and Sirius doesn't like it, and there is a part of James that doesn't like it, either.

James tries not to think about what happened between him and Snape, or the fact that it has happened since, always in some dark, forgotten corner of the castle, each time as rough and desperate and wrong as the first.

He has never told anyone, and he doubts he ever will, because it is Snape. Snape, who is unpopular and unattractive and Slytherin. Remus would laugh and Sirius would never forgive him, and Lily, who sometimes seems like she might let James have his way, Lily would never understand.

The moon is large, larger than James ever remembers it being, and its light shines silver through the trees, casting dappled shadows that dance along the thick trunk of the Willow. It's like a huge, unblinking eye, watching and waiting, and it makes James nervous and fidgety, and he wishes desperately for his cloak.

Remus howls, a low and feral sound carried across the wind. It's muted from the walls of the Shack, but it sounds angry, like Remus knows something is horribly wrong.

Snape looks paler than usual in the moonlight; white, almost ghostly, and he looks nothing like Snape, like *his* Snape, the Snape he's rubbed against and come against, the Snape whose fingers are so cold around his cock it makes shivers run down his spine.

James wonders what kind of lies Sirius fed Snape to get him out here, if he coaxed or cajoled or even flirted, or if he told Snape the truth, hoping he would have to see to believe.

Snape draws near the willow, a long, thin stick aimed at the knot, and James knows this is where he moves, this is where he stops Snape from getting hurt or worse and keeps Remus' secret safe among friends.

But he doesn't.

He tells himself that maybe Sirius is right, maybe Snape does want Remus, and maybe Snape should *see* Remus, but he tells himself it is for Sirius' sake, possibly even for Snape's sake, but certainly not for his own.

James lets Snape immobilize the Willow before stepping out of his hiding place, lets Snape start down the tunnel before he takes a deep breath and follows. Snape is halfway down the tunnel

before James gets inside, and Remus is at the other end, furious and frightening, and when he catches sight of Snape he howls loud enough to shake the walls.

Snape takes a step back, but falters, tripping over a rock on the tunnel floor, his arm scraping on the rough ground. James doesn't have to see the blood to know Remus senses it; Remus is sniffing the air, then Remus is running at Snape, growling and snapping, and Padfoot darts in front to cut him off, but Remus charges right over him.

James runs down the tunnel, pulling his wand, casting a Stunning Spell in Remus' direction as he hauls Snape up by an arm. The spell won't last long, werewolves are made of tougher stuff than humans, but it will give James a head start, and it will have to be enough.

Snape tries to fight him off, tries to twist his arm away from James' grip, but James holds on tight, fingers digging in Snape arm hard enough to bruise. He starts running before Snape is truly on his feet, dragging Snape after him as he heads for the end of the tunnel.

He runs the whole way back to the castle, until his breath comes short and there is a dull ache in his side, his fingers tight around Snape's wrist, and Snape hard on his heels. He hopes and prays as he runs, hopes Remus will forgive him, hopes Remus doesn't eat Padfoot alive, prays Peter has enough sense to shut the passageway door.

James leads Snape towards the rear of the castle, to a door he's seen Hagrid use when he comes and goes at night. It leads to a corridor that is a long way from anywhere in the castle, but the door is not spelled and the corridor is bound to be deserted.

He doesn't let go of Snape's wrist, even after they are inside the castle, even after his breathing returns to normal. Snape is still gasping and shaking, and when he finally looks at James his mouth is hanging open, his lips parted around a sentence he can't force out of his throat.

"Lupin," Snape manages finally, his voice hoarse and raw. "That was Lupin."

James opens his mouth, but just like Snape, nothing comes out, so he closes it with a snap and nods.

"Lupin is a werewolf," Snape says quietly, a slight quiver to his voice. "A werewolf. I should have known. He's sick every month."

"I'm surprised you didn't," James admits. "As well as you do in Defence."

"Don't," Snape spits. "Don't try to make this better. And don't touch me," he adds, wrenching away from James' hand.

Snape manages to get his arm free from James' grasp, but James catches it, his fingers closing tightly around Snape's wrist, so tight James can feel the delicate bones shifting under the press of his thumb.

"You tried to kill me," Snape accuses, his voice calm, too calm, the kind of calm that says he is right hysterical underneath. "You and Black. You sent me there to die."

"I didn't," James replies, studying his feet and running his free hand through his hair. "Sirius thought... and... Remus, I just, but Peter... I didn't know."

"You were there!" Snape snaps.

"Peter told me, but it was too late," James insists, forcing his voice to stay steady and smooth. "I

wasn't going to find you in the castle, so I waited, but you got in before I could stop you."

"Let go of me," Snape warns, pulling at his arm again.

"Where are you going?" James asks, his eyes wide, his hand tightening on Snape's arm.

"To Dumbledore," Snape answers.

"Dumbledore knows," James says. "He knows about Remus."

Snape snorts. "I am sure he does, but he doesn't know you and Black tried to have him eat me."

"I didn't!" James protests, desperately. "Don't. Don't go."

"Of course I am going!" Snape spits. "Now, let me go!"

"No," James says. "You can't. You can't tell anyone." He pauses, stepping closer to Snape. "I saved your life. You owe me."

"I don't owe you anything, Potter."

"Yes, you do," James insists. "I saved your life, so you owe me a debt. A Wizards Debt," he adds, almost frantic. "I am asking you, as your debt, not to tell anyone about Remus."

"I hardly think that is a valid debt," Snape argues. "You tried to kill me in the first place."

"I didn't," James says, quietly. "I wouldn't."

"You wouldn't?" Snape scoffs. "You hate me."

James doesn't argue that, because he does hate Snape, or at least he thinks he does. Or he did hate Snape, or maybe he is supposed to, but he really doesn't know any more, so he doesn't say anything.

"Let me go."

James releases his wrist, but before Snape can walk away, he pushes him back against the wall and kisses him.

Snape pushes at him, but James holds him firmly, one hand sliding around Snape's neck, the other pinning his hip to the wall.

He's never kissed Snape, even with all their messing about, that's always been hands and cocks and hurry and faster. James has kissed quite a few girls, and Sirius once, when they were both very drunk, but this is different, somehow, different in ways he can't quite explain.

The girls were sweet, with small, soft mouths and shy, nervous tongues. Snape's mouth is larger and firmer, with stubble that scrapes roughly against James' chin. It's not quite like Sirius, either, but that was a mess, because it was Sirius, and they were far too drunk to do it properly.

It's different, and he likes it, even though he knows he shouldn't, and he flicks his tongue out, slipping it between Snape's lips, teasing his way inside. Snape relaxes, his mouth falling open, his hand catching James by the robes to pull him closer.

Snape's kisses him back, his tongue warm and slick as it slides into James' mouth, his cock hard where it digs into James' hip. James rocks against him, his own cock aching for friction, aching for

Snape's familiar fingers to wrap around it.

But, when James works a hand between their bodies he doesn't pull at his own flies, he pulls at Snape's, fingers sneaking inside Snape's robes to pop the button and draw down the zip.

He shouldn't like the feel of Snape's cock in his hand, but he does. It's hot and heavy, and fits perfectly in the circle of his fingers. When he twists his wrist Snape makes a low, soft noise, and against all reason, James wants to hear it again.

He kisses Snape as he strokes him, tongue dipping into Snape's mouth in perfect rhythm with his hand. Snape moves with him, thrusting against him, into his hand, each movement pushing his hip against James' cock with teasing pressure that is not quite enough.

When Snape comes, warm and sticky over his fingers, James feels it in his mouth with Snape's moan, a quick rush of hot air and a slight tremble in Snape's lips.

And when Snape walks away from him, leaving him in a dark hallway with his cock still painfully tight in his trousers, he's not surprised.

Verse V

Nothing From Nowhere I Am No One At All

Severus is thin, and he always has been, but the floor creaks under his feet, moaning in protest at his weight. He pauses at a door, one that he assumes leads to a main room. It hangs askew in its warped door frame, and the hinges scream when he pulls it open, the shrill scrape of metal against metal.

The Shrieking Shack is the one place that truly terrifies Severus, visions and memories flashing in his mind until it is all he can do not to shake. He wonders if Potter knows this, wonders if Potter even gave it a second thought, but somehow he doubts it, knows Potter wouldn't care if he did.

The furniture is as dilapidated as the building itself, threadbare eyesores that look over a hundred years old. The tables are gouged and the couches and chairs are slashed and torn, no doubt from the werewolf's tender attentions.

Severus understands why Dumbledore chose this place as Lupin's hideout. Its reputation keeps both the students and villagers away, and if Lupin brought the place down around his ears he would be destroying nothing of value.

He cannot fathom why people would come here for any other reason than need, but from the little he has heard from Potter and from what he has gathered on his own, Potter and his friends visit the place with frequency.

Which explains the scorch marks running up one wall; he's heard that Black has an unhealthy preoccupation with fire, and he wouldn't be surprised if Pettigrew does as well. It also explains the fags and crisps packets littering the floor, the biscuit tin peeking out from under the couch and empty Butterbeer bottles on every flat surface.

There are strange marks on the floor, imprinted in the heavy layer of dust; paw prints of two different sizes and shapes, and something that looks like it was made by hooves. The larger, longer set of paw prints must be Lupin's, but he can't figure on the others, and he doesn't try, because he's

fairly sure he doesn't want to know.

Severus knows it's ridiculous to be frightened, as the full moon is weeks off and Lupin is safely away in the castle, but he is frightened, fear knotted tight in his belly, cold and heavy like ice. He has to stop himself from flinching at every noise, from glancing at every bit of furniture as if something is behind it, lying in a wait.

He wonders what bizarre flight of fancy made Potter and his friends acquire a piano, it's certainly not new, but it does not look as old as most of the décor. He can't imagine one of those miscreants plays, but if one does, it would likely be Black. He's from the sort of family that would insist their son have some kind of classical training, especially the son that was meant to be the heir.

It's an upright of no remarkable name, tucked into the far corner, its dark wood dull and dusty and scratched. The top is covered in a crocheted runner; flimsy, delicate and ridiculously out of place, its long tails dangling down like spider webs, a mostly-full bottle of firewhisky resting square in the centre as if holding it in place.

Severus lifts the lid, wincing as it creaks, and runs his fingers over the dusty, yellowed keys. He presses one softly, then another, the notes sounding with the strained, tinny quality of ancient strings in desperate need of a tuning.

"I didn't know you played."

Severus starts at Potter's voice; as much as the Shack rumbles and creaks, he hadn't heard Potter come in.

"I don't," Severus lies, turning towards Potter. Severus does play, and passably well, but he is not about to admit it. Potter would only try and wheedle him into playing for his amusement.

Potter shrugs. "We got it for Remus." He explains, pausing to hit the cigarette trapped between his fingers. "He only plays if he's had a bit to drink."

"Is he any good?" Severus asks. He knows he shouldn't, but he is intrigued. Lupin rather doesn't look the type.

"He's all right," Potter concedes. "He plays better than Sirius sings."

Severus can picture it; Black braying off-key as Lupin bangs clumsily on the piano, and the vision is far more amusing than it should be.

"I didn't know you smoked," Severus says.

"I don't," Potter says quickly, taking a final pull before dropping it on the floor and grinding down on it with his toe. "I got it from Sirius. I just..."

He trails off, favouring Severus with an odd look, and approaches the piano, reaching for the firewhisky. He takes a tot straight out of the bottle, wrinkling his nose at the taste, then flops down on the couch, leaving a cloud of dust in his wake.

"Smoking. And drinking," Severus says flatly. "That is not Head Boy behaviour, Potter. I doubt Evans would approve."

"Shut up," Potter says stiffly. He raises the bottle again, but glances quickly at Severus and sets it aside.

Severus fights the smile twisting the corners of his mouth, amused at how a mere mention of the mudblood makes Potter prickle. But, that reaction, the pinched expression and nervous twitch to Potter's lip gives Severus a good idea why he is here.

Evans seems to have finally come around, seems to have finally caved to Potter's relentless pestering and dubious charms, and now that Potter has won her, he means to be faithful. Potter wishes to talk about it, to tell Severus they can no longer meet in darkened hallways and empty classrooms, because Potter thinks it's necessary, because it is so like Potter to make a production of ending something that never really started in the first place.

"Evans... Lily gave me a date," Potter says suddenly.

"I had noticed," Severus says non-committally. He's not going to give Potter anything. If Potter wants to make a song and dance of this, he's going to do it all by himself.

But he wishes Potter wouldn't, he wishes Potter would run off to his happily ever after with Evans, would go make his litter of ugly, half-blood children without another word. Severus doesn't want to hear about it, he doesn't want to think about it, doesn't want to think about the sudden sour taste in his mouth or sickly churning in his stomach.

"I... I love her," Potter continues. "She expects me to behave, and that." He's not really looking at Severus, but at a spot over his shoulder. "I figured I should tell you."

"You are aware Evans doesn't have a cock."

The look on Potter's face is priceless, shocked and outraged at once, but it does not make Severus feel better, it is not enough to stop the biting chill that is creeping over his body.

"I don't like blokes," Potter snaps, hazel eyes narrowing.

"Of course you don't," Severus says flatly. He stands, pausing to straighten his robes before favouring Potter with a nod.

"You're leaving?" Potter asks.

"Why should I not?" Severus returns, his voice as chilly as his skin. "You've said your piece, and I have to get back to the castle."

This is true; he has to head off a Potions study session for a group of first years, and he has a foot and a half left on tomorrow's Defence essay. But he is lying to himself if he thinks it matters, he knows he would stay if Potter would only ask.

"Oh," Potter says.

His voice sounds deflated, but he doesn't say any more, doesn't ask Severus to stay. Severus knows he won't, and not just because of Evans. Even if Potter wanted Severus to stay he wouldn't ask, because that is not how Potter is, Potter would never lower himself like that.

Severus moves to Potter, instead of turning to leave as he should, taking the three steps needed to put him in front of the couch. And he drops to his knees, even though he knows he shouldn't, because he *wants* Potter to ask him to stay, wants to *make* Potter ask him to stay.

Potter protests, but weakly, and his eyes are dark with arousal and a flush is creeping over his cheeks, despite the mumbled 'no' that doesn't quite make it off his tongue. And when Severus kisses him, his mouth falls open and his tongue snakes out immediately, flooding Severus' mouth

with the tang of firewhisky and the gritty flavour of tobacco.

His breath catches when Severus' lips slide over his cock, his hips arching off the couch cushions, his hand reaching out to tangle in Severus' hair. Severus teases with his tongue, slipping along the underside, swirling over the head, and Potter moans low in his throat, a stream of nonsense spilling from his lips as he thrusts into Severus' mouth.

Severus loves this feeling, as much as he knows he shouldn't, enjoys the way he can reduce Potter to an inarticulate bundle of need, thrills at the way he can make Potter twist and writhe and plead and beg with nothing more than his lips and tongue.

He can feel the question he wants in the trembling of Potter's body, feel it when Potter tenses and his fingers twist in Severus' hair. He can hear it in Potter's breathy tone when he whispers 'please', hear it in the desperate whine Potter makes as he comes hot and thick down Severus' throat.

He can see it, on the tip of Potter's tongue, resting on the curve of his lower lip, but it's not enough, Severus wants to hear it, needs Potter to say the words. He waits, for the briefest moment, but Potter just closes his eyes and smiles.

Severus gets to his feet and exits the Shack, and Potter never says a word.

Verse VI

Mad Season

This has to stop. James knows it has to stop, because it is madness, pure and simple.

He's set to marry Lily in less than a week, in five days and a handful of hours. Lily, who means everything to him, who he has been in love with since he was eleven. Lily, who he can't picture his life without because the idea is just too painful.

He's not supposed to want this; he's only supposed to want Lily, not this, never this. Every time it happens he swears it is over, the end, the *last time*, but it always comes back, and he can't say no, can't make himself turn around and walk away.

This has to stop, for his sake, for Lily's sake, because it is wrong in so many different ways, it's a horrible dirty secret that is not fair to Lily, and Lily would never understand.

But it's not Lily he thinks of, because it's Snape underneath him, Snape laid out on his belly, arching up to meet James' thrusts, the cheap bed-linens of a Leaky Cauldron room twisted and tangled around their sweaty legs.

James doesn't think of Lily, but he doesn't think of Snape. He doesn't think of anything, just doesn't think at all, because it's painful, it hurts, hurts because it is wrong, a tight, sharp ache throbbing in his chest, making him feel like he is going to explode.

He wonders if this is what it is like to be Sirius, reckless and uncontrollable, never stopping and never thinking, like jumping off the roof without your broom, not knowing if something is there to break your fall and thinking the risk is half the fun.

Maybe this is what it's like to be Remus when he's the wolf, raw and alive, the thrill of the hunt, the thrill of the chase, wild and feral and completely out of his mind, a dark, dangerous creature driven

only by instinct and desire.

Underneath him, Snape makes a broken, desperate noise, hoarse and needy and half-muffled by the pillow. James can feel it, shivers spiralling all throughout his body, and James thrusts, hard and fast, because he wants nothing more than to hear it again.

James shouldn't be here, he should be back at his and Lily's flat. He should be listening to Lily as she talks about flowers and centrepieces and cake servers, as she complains Petunia is too tall and skinny to look proper in dress robes, that she doesn't really want her sister at the wedding, anyway. He should be back in his flat, at home with Lily, because Lily is going to be his wife.

He should stop and he should get up, he should put on his trousers and flatten his hair and walk right out the door. But Snape's body is hot and tight around him, so hot James feels like he is on fire, so tight it almost hurts. Snape is slick and sweaty under him, fingers curled in the sheets, face buried in the pillow, straining up off the bed to meet every single move James' makes.

He grabs Snape by the hips, wrenching him up and back as James scrambles to his knees, fingers digging into pale flesh, sliding over sweat-slippery skin. He thrusts into Snape hard, angling to find that place that makes Snape growl, and Snape rocks back against him, taking James in deeper, urging James to give him harder and faster and *more*.

It could never be Lily under him like this. Snape's thin but strong; smooth, hard muscles shifting under skin, planes and angles and the sharp jut of hipbones. Lily is soft and round and sweet, he could never fuck her like this, harsh and rough, could never throw her around like his, fingers biting until flesh blooms purple, teeth at the base of her neck until blood wells under his tongue.

He shouldn't want that, harsh and fast and angry and rough, not with Lily, not with anyone. And he doesn't want it when he is with Lily, didn't want it with the bird he pulled on Sirius' birthday. He only wants it when he is with Snape, when his cock's in Snape's arse or Snape's cock's in his mouth, or when he has Snape pressed up against the wall of some dark, filthy alley.

His fevered mind thinks nonsense thoughts, crazy thoughts, things he knows can't possibly be true. He thinks of love spells and lust potions, of Confundus Charms and Imperius, but he knows the very idea is ridiculous, even if Snape is what he is.

James knows what side Snape is on, he's heard the whispers, and he's seen the Mark, hidden and secret, a dark inky poison creeping across pale skin. That is the thing that truly makes this madness, because Snape is against everything he believes in, because Snape could turn at any moment and kill him. It scares him, but it also makes excitement course through his body, it makes him hard and it makes him *want*.

But he shouldn't want that, for his sake, for Lily's sake, because Lily loves him, and Lily wants children, *a family*, and James has to stay alive to keep them safe.

He'll never understand how it came this far, how an accidental meeting in an empty corridor with an ugly boy he loathed turned into such a spectre, became a ghost that has haunted him for almost four years. He doesn't like blokes, he never liked blokes. If he'd wanted blokes he could have had them, nicer, better looking ones, ones he didn't hate, Sirius or Remus or Gideon Prewitt, even fucking Peter, anyone at school but Severus Snape.

But Snape makes that noise again, desperate and needy, half-choked like it is stuck in his throat, and James forgets, forgets about all of it, forgets Lily and families and Hogwarts and Dark Marks. He feels light-headed and out of control and all he wants to do is thrust, to slam into Snape until Snape makes that noise again.

And Lily could never break *him* apart like this, make him dizzy and mad and completely out of his mind, and he hates himself for it, hates Snape for it, and when James reaches around Snape's hip to take Snape in his hand he hears Snape's voice in his head, mocking and cold, *you are aware Evans doesn't have a cock*, and he comes, he fucking comes apart at the seams, and he hates himself again twice as much, and he hates Snape even more.

Snape comes, hot and sticky in James' hand, spilling over James' fingers onto the cheap, rough sheets. Snape gives a jerk, his body snapping taut, his muscles rippling around James' cock, and another wave of sensation sweeps over James' body, so good it almost hurts, so much he almost forgets how to breathe.

And then, James does what he knows he should have done all along. He puts on his trousers and flattens his hair, and Apparates to his and Lily's flat without looking back.

Verse VII

I'd Kill Myself For You, I'd Kill You For Myself

The Buccaneer is a Muggle pub in the south of Surrey, hidden in the middle of a business district. It's cramped, and slightly shabby, with a long bar that takes up most of the interior and only a few tables and chairs. There are a few Muggle leisure devices tucked in the far corner, and rooms for rent on the second floor.

It also has a small Wizarding section, through a broom cupboard in the rear of the building, put in when the owner's son married the Squib daughter of a Ministry Official.

Severus enters the Wizarding section directly, through a Floo grate that dumps him out almost behind the bar, and he glances around, frowning as he rights himself. It is almost an exact replica of the Leaky Cauldron, down to the dusty floors and rough-hewn furniture, and the wizened old bartender who is as bald and toothless as Tom.

He never much liked the Leaky Cauldron, even though he could never put his finger on why, and though he hasn't been there in years, this place gives him the same vague sense of unease.

The room is mostly empty, save for a pair of old witches in one corner, and a young man at the bar that seems to be asleep. This is not really a surprise, given the delicate state of things; most witches and wizards are afraid to step outside and do a spot of gardening, let alone lounge for long periods out in the open, under the influence of firewhisky.

The room also lacks Potter, who is the only reason Severus is here, and this only serves to annoy him. Severus does not wish to be out in public any more than the witches and wizards hiding in their homes.

Severus is not even sure why he came in the first place.

He's tempted to ask the bartender if anyone else has been about, but he decides against it, because he does not want to draw attention to himself. Instead, he Transfigures his robes into something resembling an overcoat, and heads for the door across the room.

The Muggle section is garishly decorated in an overstated pirate theme, round booths shaped like the crow's nest on a mast, a crude caricature of a topless woman carved into the end of the bar. It is

also full, a person sitting at every barstool, people packed shoulder to shoulder in the available floor space.

Severus spots Potter at the bar, a Muggle baseball cap over that insufferable hair, the lenses of his glasses charmed so dark they are nearly black. His fingers are curled loosely around a bottle of Muggle beer that he seems to be ignoring, and his eyes are focused on the shelf of liquor bottles behind the bar, but Severus doubts he is really looking at them.

He walks right past Potter, ignoring him flawlessly, and speaks with the spotty girl working the till at the end of the bar. She gives Severus a look that says she thinks it is too early to be asking for a room, but he ignores this as well, handing her a good deal more Muggle money than the room is worth and not waiting around for change.

He doesn't look over at Potter as he walks away from the till, but he doesn't have to, he knows Potter sees him, he can almost feel Potter's eyes on him.

Severus didn't ask the spotty girl where the stairs are, but he assumes they are near the Muggle leisure devices, and heads that direction, pushing his way through the crowd. He pities the Muggles as he passes them. They seem such simple creatures, knocking brightly-coloured balls around a wide, green table, tossing sharp objects at a segmented section of wall.

The room makes the Leaky Cauldron's accommodations look posh. The wallpaper is peeling in more places than it is secure, the bed is tilted at a precarious angle, and there is a layer of dust on every flat surface. The room smells strongly of wet dog, and Severus is sure he does not want to know why.

Potter is upstairs in a matter of moments, knocking softly on the door, opening it just enough to slip inside at Severus' gruff reply. Potter removes the hat and lets his glasses return to normal, and Severus notices he looks thinner and more haggard than the last time Severus saw him, the night Potter fucked him through the mattress of an uncomfortable Leaky Cauldron bed.

His face is drawn and pinched, dark circles marring the skin beneath his eyes. Severus wonders how well Potter is faring as a marked man, how well he is sleeping at night, knowing his life depends on Pettigrew, knowing the lives of his son and his precious Evans depend on the strength of his weakest friend.

Severus wonders if Potter has any idea just how well his secret is being kept.

Potter studies him for a moment, working his mouth like he means to speak, but Severus turns away and busies himself with removing his robes. He doesn't want to hear it, doesn't want Potter to say anything, Potter should know as well as Severus does that the time for words has passed.

Severus pulls Potter to him when he lingers at the edge of the bed, even though he knows he shouldn't. He doesn't want Potter to talk and he doesn't want to think, he just wants Potter to make him feel.

Potter's weight on him is both familiar and foreign. Severus knows Potter's body well, he has mapped out every inch of it over the last five years. But it is not his, it is not for him, Severus doubts it is even for Evans, it belongs to Potter and Potter alone.

Even so, Severus can't stop himself from touching it, from smoothing his hands over Quidditch-muscles gone slightly soft from lack of use, from tracing the lines of ribs just barely visible, a sign that Potter's nerves are wearing away his appetite.

Potter's mouth is sour and stale, the bitter tang of Muggle beer is on his tongue, and a faint hint of ash that speaks of tobacco. It reminds Severus of the last time he saw Potter smoking, the day Potter approached the subject of Evans, reminds him of the futility of everything that was said and done in that afternoon.

He thinks of Potter in the Shrieking Shack, afraid that Evans would learn of his dirty, wicked secret. He wonders if Potter realizes a secret is what he has become, something no one talks about, something no one dares whisper about, something tucked away inside a vault, only to be forgotten.

Severus wishes he could forget, forget Potter's Quidditch-callused fingers curling around his cock, forget Potter's cock sliding into his body, long and thick and almost too much, too much until Potter starts to move and everything else disappears.

But he can't forget, it's all right there, lying in wait just under the surface. And Potter brings it back, brings all of it back, with the long fingers teasing over his nipples, with the wet kisses he trails down Severus' body.

Severus bites his lip when Potter's mouth envelopes his cock, bites down so hard he tastes blood when Potter's lips move over him, his tongue tracing delicate patterns across hard, heated flesh. He swallows the moan fighting its way out of his throat and stills his hips from arching off the bed. He knows he's not fooling Potter, knows he's only fooling himself, but refuses to give Potter that, refuses to give Potter anything, even though it doesn't matter any more.

And Severus is quiet when he comes, hardly a gasp, hand clamped over his mouth as he screams silently in his head. He wants to beg, he wants to plead, but he doesn't, not now, not ever again, and he twists the rough, dusty sheets around his fingers as Potter swallows, swallows everything Severus has to give, and he closes his eyes tight when Potter moves up his body.

Potter kisses him, slick tongue flicking over Severus' lips before pushing its way inside, but Severus can hardly taste himself, can only taste beer and cigarettes, ashy and sour, as dirty and stale as death.

And Potter's cock slides inside him, hot and hard and so perfect he hates it, hates it as much as he needs it, and he does need it, as much as he can't bring himself to admit it.

When Severus dares to open his eyes he sees that Potter's are open, wide and hazel and naked without his glasses, but they are fogged and unfocused, not watching, not looking, and Severus wonders if Potter even knows who is underneath him.

Just then, he knows exactly what made Pettigrew snap, what made Pettigrew spill all of his greatest hero's secrets. Not Black's cruelty or Lupin's pity, but Potter's complete and utter apathy, the fact that Potter never even noticed that Pettigrew was there.

He comes again, not because he wants to, not because he wants to give Potter the satisfaction, but because Potter makes him, forces it out of him, with a snap of his hips and a rough, hard thrust to just the right place, with long, thin fingers curled around his cock and sharp teeth nipping into the soft skin of his neck.

Severus does moan then, low and hoarse, because he can't stop himself, can't keep it locked inside, and his body jerks, arching off the bed, his muscles tightening around Potter's thrusting cock.

And Potter comes, collapsing on top of Severus as he fills him in a white, hot rush, and Severus pretends he doesn't hear when Potter whispers Black's name into the curve of his neck.

It's not the first time Potter has called Severus by someone else's name, but Severus knows it will be the last.

Tomorrow, James Potter will die.

Appendix I

Cemetery Gates

It happens so fast, there is no time to think, no time to move and no time to react. One moment he is curled on the couch with Lily in front of the fire, and the next, the living room wall is crumbling and the air is full of heavy, acrid smoke.

James stares in shock as something moves, something tall and cloaked, coming towards him with an almost serpentine grace. Then the hood falls back and James is looking at the Man himself, the Man who every witch and wizard fears above all others.

He almost thinks, with a fleeting fit of grandeur, that he and Lily can take him together. But when he reaches for Lily, she is not there, she's already fled the room, her first instinct to protect Harry.

And, James is scared, more frightened than he has ever been in his life, so cold inside his skin pebbles and turns to ice, a weight in the pit of his stomach so heavy he can't move.

He thinks of Sirius, and of Remus, and wonders if they are still alive, or if He has already found them and killed them. He thinks of Peter, and how he must have suffered, how mercilessly He and his followers must have tortured Peter, if he gave away James' secret.

He thinks of Lily, and how much he loves her, and thinks of Harry, of Harry's sweet, precious life being cut so short, and he finds strength in his legs, taking a ragged, shaking breath as he forces himself upright.

And the Man laughs, high and cruel, but through it, James can hear Lily's desperate sobs, hear the terrified wails of his innocent son.

As James stands in his living room, with nothing between himself and death but a shaking wand and a jumble of spells he can hardly remember, he thinks of the things he did, and the things he never said, of the lies he told and the secrets he kept, and he thinks of Severus Snape.

And as James is blinded by a flash of sickly, emerald light, he wonders if Snape had known, wonders if his Snape had even cared.

Appendix II

Post-Mordem Prometheus

Dumbledore once told him that time heals all wounds.

Severus wants to believe this, he has always wanted to believe this, but time has come and time has gone, and his wounds are still as raw as the day they cut him to the core.

Every time Severus thinks he has repented for his sins, thinks he has forgiven himself and forgotten, something comes along and reminds him that he may well be damned forever.

He doesn't notice Harry Potter until Professor McGonagall calls his name for the Sorting, but once he notices, once he sees him, Severus is unable to tear his eyes away. Emotions he thought had been buried with James' body flood to the surface, each as angry and violent as the last.

Severus watches Harry Potter through the feast, watches him whisper with the Weasley boy, just like his father and Black, their body language speaking of a bond of brotherhood forged in the length of a train ride.

The Weasley boy's eyes drift to the Slytherin table, and Severus watches as he sneers at Malfoy's son, his lip curled with disdain, his eyes cold and hateful. He watches Harry Potter, at the Weasley boy's side, regarding Malfoy's son with indifference, with a disinterested expression Severus could almost think he learned from his father.

When Harry Potter's eyes meet his across the Great Hall, Severus feels a tight pain in his chest, even as nausea ebbs over him in waves. Severus takes in the familiar face and over-large glasses and insufferable mop of unruly hair, and guilt gnaws at him, above all else, eating away at his insides.

And right then, he hates James Potter, for who he was and the things he did, and for everything he left behind. And he hates himself, hates himself more than he ever hated James Potter in life, for things he should have said, and the things he should have done, for all the secrets and lies and betrayal.

Harry Potter turns away from Severus, drops Severus' gaze to look at the Weasley boy. Harry Potter runs a hand through his hair and smiles, and Severus finds he can breathe again.

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